

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Merry Christmas! Happy Seventh Day of Christmas! Today, as the carol proclaims, *“On the Seventh Day of Christmas, my true love gave to me: seven swans a-swimming,”* which are the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, piety, and the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-2).

Part of what makes Christmas Eve and Christmas Day so meaningful is that it is easy to locate Jesus – and with Him, God’s grace and salvation on these holy days. We know exactly where to look. Our Savior is in *O Little Town of Bethlehem, Away in a Manger* where *Gentle Mary Laid Her Child*.

But what about this morning? The infant Jesus is no longer in Bethlehem. The angels have departed, and the shepherds have returned to their fields. The days and weeks following Christmas Eve and Christmas Day can leave us feeling disoriented, confused (what day is it?), and even depressed (the parties are over). Your family has returned home. Despite it still being the Christmas season, the Christmas music on the radio has returned to ‘80s and ‘90s pop. The days leading up to Christmas were shiny and bright, but now we are back to normal, and for most of us, we are back to work.

Where do we find Jesus? To find Jesus, we must travel with Joseph and Mary from the manger to the temple. Today may be the Seventh Day of Christmas, but we are moving forward in time to the 40th day of Jesus’ earthly life. So, today, we find Joseph, Mary, and the 40-day-old infant Jesus in Jerusalem at the temple. They are there for the purification of the mother, which must be done on the 40th day since the birth of a child according to Jewish ceremonial Law, so that she shall be clean. But we also see on this day, that Joseph and Mary are not wealthy, as they give the alternate sacrifice: ***“a pair of two turtledoves, or two young pigeons”*** in place of a lamb (Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:24). But at that moment, we can also see that no lamb for sacrifice was necessary, because already here at 40 days old, Jesus is the Lamb of God brought to His temple for sacrifice.

Now, while at the temple, Joseph and Mary meet a man named Simeon. There is nothing great or wonderful about Simeon. He has no high office. He has no standing or power. He is just a man. But is he just any ordinary man?

In fact, Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit. By faith in the promise, Simeon was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Through the Holy Spirit, it was revealed to him that he would not taste death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

So, as Simeon was waiting at the temple, all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit leads him to Joseph and Mary, who is holding Jesus. Then he asks Mary if he can hold the Child, and then he speaks what is known as the Nunc Dimittis, the Song of Simeon:

***“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel”*** (Luke 2:29-32).

Oftentimes, we get so used to the liturgy. Sometimes, when we sing the Nunc Dimittis, we sing it just from rote memory while not really understanding what we are singing. As sinners, we can easily daydream while we sing or say the liturgy.

So, what are we saying when we sing the Nunc Dimittis? First, what does “Nunc Dimittis” mean? Well, Nunc Dimittis is from Latin, which are the first words of Simeon's Song: *“Now you dismiss.”*

As Simeon spoke the Nunc Dimittis to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, he wasn't making a request of the Lord. Rather, Simeon was making a statement of fact: *“You now dismiss your servant in peace.”*

After years of waiting at the Jerusalem temple as a watchman waiting for the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, Simeon's service was now at an end. The watch is over. He can now retire in peace. With his eyes of faith, Simeon sees more than just an infant in his arms, he sees the Savior dying on the cross, he sees salvation for all people, both Jew and Gentile.

Joseph and Mary marveled at the words spoken by Simeon. But Simeon was not finished. He blessed the Holy Family and then said to Mary, ***“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed”*** (Luke 2:34-35).

Through the Holy Spirit, Simeon received a special revelation concerning the destiny of the infant Jesus. Israel would be divided over Him. Jesus would cause some to fall and some to rise. Jesus would be a rock of offense over which many would stumble. But for others, Jesus would be the Living Stone of salvation.

Maybe, Simeon spoke these words directly to Mary as he knew that she, not Joseph, would witness their Son's suffering and death on the cross, and her own soul would be crushed in witnessing her Son's death.

So, Simeon's words must have caused Joseph and Mary to marvel at what was said about the infant Jesus. Simeon's words added to what they had already seen and heard from the angel Gabriel and the shepherds.

But that day wasn't over quite yet for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. An elderly woman named Anna was also waiting for salvation. And unlike Simeon, who came and went from the temple, Anna remained at the temple grounds as she worshipped with fasting and prayer, night and day. She, too, came up to the Holy Family and gave thanks to God and later spoke of the infant Jesus to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. So, you could say, Anna was the first missionary.

But what about us this morning? Where do we find Christ? Well, think of the Nunc Dimittis.

In the Nunc Dimittis, we sing the words that Simeon spoke as he held the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple. These very words:

**☐ Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word,
for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.**

So, on this Seventh Day of Christmas and at every Divine Service, we find Jesus in His temple – *where He promises to be* – in our holy places of worship. He had deigned graciously to meet us here in His Means of Grace, His Holy Word and Sacraments.

We find Christ in His Word, which we read here; which you read in your homes; which you carry with you in your memory, thoughts, and prayers.

We find Christ in the absolution and the Gospel proclamation throughout the Divine Service.

We find Christ in His Holy Sacraments. Through Confession and Absolution, we are strengthened in our baptismal unity with Christ, and are assured once again that *“whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mark 16:16a).

But most importantly, we find Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Here, we find our Savior from sin in the most concrete, specific, and intimate way. This is why the Nunc Dimittis is sung immediately after the Lord’s Supper.

Simeon held the incarnate Son of God in his arms. In the Sacrament, we, too, hold the incarnate Son. Yet, our “seeing” of God’s salvation is done by faith. Simeon spoke these words about nothing more than an Infant. We now sing these words about the Lord, who is bodily present in, with, and under bread and wine in the Sacrament.

Just as Simeon could say his eyes had seen the Lord’s salvation in the infant Jesus, we too sing those words because in the Sacrament of the Altar, we have seen, held, and tasted the Lord’s salvation: the Body and Blood of Christ given and shed for us for the forgiveness of all our sin.

So, there should not be any confusion about where to look for God’s grace and His presence. God is with us. He is Emmanuel. God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who is with us through His Means of Grace. He is here – as He has promised to be wherever two or three of his people gather in His name, and where His word of forgiveness and life is proclaimed. Christ is the true and permanent Temple, who brings His light of salvation to us at each Divine Service.

Christ is here for all those who are searching. The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple and He leads us to this place where we embrace the Messiah, praise Him, and bring our needs before Him, and, with Anna, we bear witness of His salvation to others. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +